

Winter 2016
AMERICAN POLITICS FIELD EXAM

Answer **THREE** of the following questions, but no more than **TWO** from *SECTION A* or *SECTION B*. All answers must be typed.

SECTION A

1. Scholars argue that policing and punishment are central forms of state activity. In particular, they claim that the “carceral state” has reshaped key aspects of political life, especially for the black urban poor. Consider the influence of U.S. criminal justice policies on three core features of American politics (1) citizen participation and influence, (2) political socialization and learning, and (3) the role of the state in the lives of citizens. (A) What are the main alleged effects of the carceral state in each of these areas? (B) What evidence, and with what research designs, has been offered to demonstrate these putative effects? How convincing is this evidence and what are the key threats to inference?
2. Recent scholarship in American political development has challenged the prevailing notion of “big bang” moments of state formation in either the Progressive era or the New Deal. In the process, this new work has “backfilled” the history of the modern American state with extensive evidence of early precedents for current practices. (A) What are three important instances/cases in which practices precede similar provisions either from the Progressive era or New Deal? (B) Evaluate this new political-legal-historical research from a political science standpoint. How convincing are these arguments against the traditional view of the early American state as “weak” or a “laggard”? (C) How, if at all, does it change our understanding of twentieth-century state-building?
3. “Contemporary political science discourse devotes enormous attention to attacking rational choice theories of political behavior. Nonetheless, critics offer little in the way of alternative models for predicting future actions. Despite the claim that rational choice theories neglect important details of the ‘real world,’ these abstractions contribute significantly to our development of the theoretical building blocks necessary for political science to create a unified and tractable model of political interaction. Parsimony and formalism are reasonable consequences of moving to develop true ‘theory’ in political science.” Assess the persuasiveness of this claim with reference to two subfields of American politics. Be sure to address the likely counterarguments to your position.
4. One claim about the general dynamics of American Politics is that policy outcomes tend to be extreme—that is, they diverge from the preferences of the median voter. (A) What evidence exists to support this contention and how persuasive is it? (B) What are the primary forces at work in the US that might generate policy outcomes that depart from the preferences of the median voter in the electorate? How important is each? (C) Are there countervailing forces that push policy back towards the center? Your answer should consider at least two specific policy areas, such as taxes, social security, immigration, health care, the environment, and education.

SECTION B

1. Elite polarization during the early 1900s was as stark as in the contemporary Congress. And yet, members of Congress crossed party lines to enact many important pieces of legislation by large bipartisan margins. What does current American politics scholarship have to say about this pattern? That is, what does the literature say about the situations (1) that will cause legislators to act rather than allow the status quo to stand, (2) work across party, regional, and other differences, and (3) find consensus rather than return to state out opposing partisan positions? Where does this past work fall short? Is there a better explanation, and if so, what is it?
2. “Judicial politics is fundamentally different from the ‘politics of’ presidential behavior, administrative agencies, Congress, or other elites.” Discuss with reference to existing theoretical and empirical scholarship. What evidence would serve to validate or falsify this claim?
3. Converse’s (1964) “nonattitudes” thesis is that Americans often lack meaningful views of even the most important political issues. This has led some scholars to conclude that, if Converse is correct, “democracy loses its starting point” (Achen 1975). (A) What is our current understanding of the accuracy of Converse’s empirical point? (B) What does existing work have to say about the relationship between voter attitudes, voting behavior, and the desirability and feasibility of democracy?
4. Table 2 below comes from Ansolabehere, Gerber, and Snyder’s 2002 APSR article, “Equal Money, Equal Votes.” This is a county-level analysis with data from 1960. The dependent variable is the relative per capita funding that the state gives to the county. This is measured by taking the amount of money transferred from the state to the county, dividing that by the county population, and then dividing that by the average per capita amount provided to the counties in the state. The key independent variable, *Relative representation*, indicates how well the county population is represented in the state legislature. This is measured by first taking the number of legislative seats in a county divided by the population in the county, and then dividing this by the number of seats in the state over the state population.

Independent Variable	1960	1960
Relative representation	.34 (.01)	.17 (.01)
Population growth rate		-.19 (.03)
Average income		-.01 (.04)
% poor		.22 (.03)
% unemployed		.06 (.01)
% in school		.40 (.05)
% age 65 or older		-.03 (.02)
% black		-.02 (.02)
% turnout		.19 (.02)
% Democrat × non-Republican control		.04 (.03)
% Democrat × Republican control		-.02 (.04)
<i>N</i>	3,048	3,048
<i>R</i> ²	.33	.50

Note: Dummy variables for each state included in all regressions.

- A) In 1960, many states violated the “one-person-one-vote” imperative because populations in some counties had more representation per person than populations in other counties. Make up a fictitious county in a fictitious state that is neither over-represented nor under-represented compared to other counties (i.e., it has a *relative representation* value of 1). List the county’s population, number of representatives, as well as the population and the number of representatives of the state. Calculate the *relative representation*. Show your work.
- B) Interpret the coefficient on *relative representation* in Table 2, column 1.
- C) When control variables are included in the regression, the coefficient value on *relative representation* changes. Why? Consider at least two statistically significant control variables. Theorize why they might have an independent effect on the dependent variable.
- D) Think about how this regression might produce biased estimates of the relationship between relative representation and relative transfers. Identify at least two possible threats to causal inference and how they might distort the findings.
- E) Following *Baker v Carr*, states were required to construct legislative districts that were apportioned according to the one-person-one-vote rule. Counties that were previously given relatively small amounts of transfers from the state began receiving transfers aligned with their population sizes. How does this finding contrast with other political science perspectives on the role of the judicial branch in effecting policy change?